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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 001841

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TAGS: PREL SOCI JA CH

SUBJECT: PRC-JAPAN HISTORY DIALOGUE: COMFORT WOMEN ISSUE  
LOW PROFILE BUT MUCH CONTROVERSY REMAINS

REF: A. BEIJING 1627

1B. TOKYO 537

Classified By: Daniel Shields, Political Minister Counselor.  
Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

11. (C) Chinese and Japanese historians meet in Tokyo March 19-20 to conduct the second round of a dialogue on modern history intended to calm tensions in both countries, scholars and officials involved with the project told us. Officials say press reports that Premier Wen will cut short his April 11 visit to Tokyo and Kyoto because of concerns about PM Abe's comfort women remarks are wrong and the comfort women issue has not yet become a focus of the history talks. Rather, the Nanjing Massacre, Chinese history texts and visits to war memorials by Japanese officials are among key issues of controversy for the history scholars. Wrapped up in both sides of the history dialogue are public and government attitudes towards Japanese militarism, China's expanding political and economic power and Japan's desire for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. End Summary.

Panel Diverts History Issue, So Ties Can Improve

12. (C) The China-Japan Joint History Dialogue is an effort by both governments to influence public opinion and calm passions in China and Japan that threaten to interfere with efforts by the two governments to improve bilateral relations, scholars and officials involved with the project tell us. Chinese panel member Tao Wenzhao of the American Studies Institute at the China Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) told us the panel reflects the desire of both governments to improve relations and set aside history as a topic of contention. "When a politician raises the history issue, both countries can say that their historians are addressing it," Tao said. CASS History Institute Chair Bu Ping, who chairs the Chinese delegation to the talks, told us Beijing agreed to the long standing Japanese request for such a dialogue reluctantly and only as a deliverable for PM Abe's October 2006 visit to Beijing.

13. (C) History, especially Chinese concerns that Japanese leaders will visit Yasukuni Shrine where Class A War Criminals are enshrined, remains China's top bilateral concern with Tokyo, MFA DDG for Asia Qiu Guohong told PolMinCouns recently (Ref A). Tao said that President Hu Jintao is proceeding cautiously on visiting Tokyo and reciprocating PM Abe's October visit to Beijing because the Chinese government remains concerned that Abe will visit the shrine. As a result, PM Wen will travel to Tokyo in April and President Hu will watch and see whether PM Abe visits the

shrine this fall before scheduling a trip, likely in connection with 2008 G-8 meetings in Japan, Tao said.

Beijing Low Key So Far on "Comfort Women" Remark

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¶ 14. (C) Asia DDG Qiu said that although FM Li Zhaoxing condemned PM Abe's March 5 remarks suggesting WWII comfort women were not coerced, overall Beijing has not emphasized the comfort women issue "out of consideration of the domestic political factors in Japan" that prompted Abe's remark. China noted closely PM Abe's subsequent statement that Japan has not abandoned then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono's apology to the women, Qiu added. China considers it an "undeniable fact" that these women were abused, he said, adding that the Japanese government retains a responsibility toward those abused women who are still living. The MFA Spokesman refrained from commenting on Abe's remark in the March 13 and 15 press briefings but said questions about compensation should be addressed in accord with a 1972 Joint Statement.

¶ 15. (C) Scholars Tao and Bu told us that Abe's remarks about "comfort women" have not yet become a political issue in Beijing. They noted, however, that the topic might be added to the list of items to be discussed by the history panel. China has not reacted strongly to the "comfort women" issue so far so as to prevent other history issues from resurfacing, according to Li Dunqiu, a Northeast Asia expert at the State Council Development and Research Center.

¶ 16. (C) MFA Japan Division official Lu Guijun and Japanese Embassy Political Counselor Kazuhiro Suzuki told us separately that press reports suggesting PM Wen will cut short his April 11 visit to Tokyo because of unhappiness over

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the comfort women remarks are wrong. Suzuki said Tokyo has been very pleased with recent Chinese press coverage about bilateral relations, in particular regarding President Hu Jintao's meeting with visiting LDP Secretary General Hidenao Nakagawa and Premier Wen's positive remarks about China-Japan relations in his speech to the National People's Congress.

Concern About Education and China's Rise

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¶ 17. (C) China's concerns about Japan's history and what China sees as Japan's failure to acknowledge the injury caused to its neighbors are widely known, Bu said. Most Chinese believe that Japan has for the past 20 years systematically denied its history in the run-up to and during the Second World War. Anti-Japanese insults are commonplace in public discourse and to be called "pro-Japanese" remains an insult, Bu stressed. But the concerns that Japanese scholars aired about Chinese education and China's rising political and economic power are not so well known in China, Bu said. In their first round of talks in December (ref B), Japanese scholars stressed that China does not properly educate its young people about post-WWII Japan, including apologies made by Japanese politicians and Japan's democratic transformation. Japanese scholars complain that history textbooks, China's "patriotic education" and Chinese memorials and museums promote anti-Japanese attitudes, such as those that erupted into street protests in April 2005, Bu added.

¶ 18. (C) Bu acknowledged that Japan's desire for a UN Security Council seat was a "lesser contributing factor" to the anti-Japanese protests in China. Bu said he personally has no problem with Japan's holding a permanent UNSC seat as Japan has met objective criteria of being financially and politically active on international affairs. But many Chinese oppose Japan's bid because of a lack of trust about Japan's future intentions, particularly its military intentions. Many Chinese perceive a resurgence in Japanese militarism, symbolized by the recent creation of a Japanese

Ministry of Defense, and a Japanese wish to contain China. A key goal of the joint history project is confidence-building between the two sides, which might address China's concerns about Japanese militarism, Bu said.

Product of Talks Will Be Joint Papers

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¶ 9. (C) Bu said that, during this week's consultations, ten scholars from China and ten from Japan will begin discussing ten themes identified during the first round of talks in December 2006. The themes will come from three historical periods: pre-WWII (1840-1931), WWII (1931-1945) and post-WWII (1945-present). Concrete historical events, like the Nanjing Massacre, will be among the topics, but most papers will touch on larger themes and topics of ethics, such as Japanese militarism or the causes of WWII. The scholars have already agreed to set aside most historical issues involving Taiwan as too controversial, Bu added.

¶ 10. (C) Bu said that after assigning responsibility for initial papers at this meeting, the scholars will adjourn to conduct research and write. They will meet again in December to exchange first drafts of papers, and later exchange comments and criticisms. The goal of the project is to produce joint papers with some common views by August 2008, although it is clear that the Chinese and Japanese might often have to "agree to disagree," Bu said. Tao doubted the project would be complete in time for the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Learning from Korean, German Experiences

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¶ 11. (C) Bu said the China-Japan Joint History Dialogue is modeled after an ROK-Japan joint history project that has been meeting for three years and has enjoyed some success in establishing a basis for improved relations. Bu will visit Seoul to consult about the ROK-Japan project. He will also visit Europe this summer to study the work of history and reconciliation projects conducted between Germany and France and Germany and Poland, respectively. When criticizing Japan's attitude toward WWII, Chinese often contrast Tokyo's reaction unfavorably with the anti-Nazi laws and public apologies that allowed Germany to reintegrate successfully into Europe, Bu said.

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